



U.S. food aid destined for Chad includes sorghum, cornmeal, lentils, vegetable oil and corn-soya blend. This shipment will allow the World Food Program to provide 200,000 refugees with almost all the commodities needed for their daily diet over a two-month period.

USUN Rome Works to Reduce Hunger

By Carla Benini

When Geoff Wiggin, the agricultural counselor for the U.S. Mission to the U.N. Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome, and Mike Cleverley, the mission's deputy chief, arrived at the Porta Farm squatter camp in Zimbabwe to observe the distribution of American food, they were hardly prepared for what they found. Amid makeshift rows of mud-floored shacks and huts were thousands of former commercial farm workers. The Harare government had dumped them there, offering only promises of new homes—someday. The best thing in the camp was a school where twice a day the United Nation's World Food Program provided children with food supplied by the United States. Enrollment soared after the school lunches began.

Many in the camp lived on their daily ration of American corn and soy oil blend. In one crude shelter, two boys, ages 7 and 12, were orphaned heads of household, fending for themselves after their parents had died from AIDS a few months before. The younger made meals from the American maize so the older boy could attend school.

"Putting into action America's commitment to alleviate hunger and build hope in the world" is USUN Rome's mission statement. Under Ambassador Tony Hall, the mission assists America's effort to bring aid to the world's hungry and rural poor. The mission serves as the U.S. government's representative to the U.N.'s World Food Program and Food and Agriculture Organization and to the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The U.S. Agency for International Development, the Foreign Agriculture Service and State staff

USUN Rome, one of three U.S. diplomatic missions in the Eternal City.

The mission works with other country missions to resolve problems in the field. For example, when the World Food Program was looking for an alternative route for shipments destined for Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad, Ambassador Hall met with his Libyan counterpart and was able to work out an agreement. In November, they met the first-ever shipment of food aid to land on Libyan shores en route to thousands of Darfur refugees.

"Last year, the U.S. gave \$1.46 billion in food and money to the WFP, which represents about 57 percent of their budget. This is the largest U.S. donation to a U.N. agency in history," Ambassador Hall said. "This story is not being told enough in the world, let alone America."

Ambassador Hall has traveled to more than 110 countries since 1993 as a spokesman for the hungry and for America's commitment to help. Mission staffers have followed his lead, traveling to war-torn, hunger-ravaged and poverty-stricken regions to observe firsthand what U.S. and international efforts have accomplished.

During a March visit to Swaziland, staff observed a school feeding program that increased enrollment by 20 percent and reduced malnourishment among the 500 children, thanks to U.S.-donated corn, soybeans and vegetable oil. The United States donated \$50 million to school feeding programs in 2004 alone.



Above: Sudanese women distribute American vegetable oil in Zalengie, West Darfur. Below: Children at San Pablo La Laguna Primary School in Guatemala with visiting U.N. official. Recent figures indicated that 89 percent of first-grade children in this town showed symptoms of chronic malnutrition.



Field visits can result in new solutions and bring in new aid partners. In rural Zimbabwe, where crop yields were limited by lack of water, mission officers reported on the radical turnaround of a village supplied with treadle pumps, simple inexpensive devices used to pull water from the ground. The report was picked up by a nongovernmental organization that became interested in buying and donating treadle pumps. USUN Rome helped close the deal.

The magnitude of world hunger far exceeds current aid. "The toughest time we have is to get the press to really bring this to the attention of people in the world, stir them up and demand that legislatures develop the political and spiritual will to battle this problem," Ambassador Hall said. Filmmakers who joined him in Ethiopia are documenting the massive needs of famine-plagued populations and the serious efforts America is making.

The U.N. in Rome

Three agencies are charged with fighting hunger. The largest of the agencies in Rome—and in the entire U.N. system—is the Food and Agriculture Organization. It brings together more than 180 country representatives to negotiate standards for international fishing and food safety and share agricultural policy expertise. The organization provides market analysis and technical assistance to developing countries in every region. It also supports 70 field offices that implement policy and educate farmers, fishermen and others.

The World Food Program is the U.N.'s emergency food provider. In 2003, it fed 104 million people in 81 countries who were victims of political turmoil, war or natural disasters. In Iraq alone, it kept 24 million people from going hungry. The organization also spearheads longer-term development programs, including school feeding and food for work. The United States is the largest donor, consistently providing between half and two-thirds of the WFP's budget.

The smaller, more narrowly focused International Fund for Agricultural Development targets the rural

poor in the most remote regions. It might support a program as small as a single village irrigation system. The agency aims to reach those without other financial support.

The mission's priorities shift according to crises that come up. For example, when the locust plague in the Sahel region of Africa reached catastrophic proportions, the mission raised public awareness about the crisis and the slow response from aid organizations. The mission brought together scientists and U.N. experts from the Sahel to beat the bugs.

Though crises may be fast-breaking, multilateral diplomacy often requires slow and patient consensus building. Agriculture and State officers work to encourage U.N. agencies to support biotechnology in improving agricultural pro-

ductivity in the developing world. Officers are working to implement a treaty promoting agricultural genetics to improve crops.

Hunger remains a formidable adversary that requires personal and international commitment. But it's a problem "we know how to fix," Ambassador Hall says. The mission hopes to cut hunger in half by 2015. ■

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Ambassador Tony Hall with children from the Democratic Republic of Congo.